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NATURAL HERITAGE ACT

Proposed Policy Foundation

REVISED SUMMARY REPORT

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Update - Proposed Policy Foundation Revised

In March 1998, a document entitled "Proposed Policy Foundation for the *Natural Heritage Act*" was released for public review. Following a two-and-a-half month input process, responses were reviewed and summarized. Over 2000 information packages were distributed; about 10 per cent resulted in written responses. Submissions on the proposed policy foundation showed general agreement on the need to consolidate existing protected areas legislation and develop a simplified classification system. The consultation also identified several key issues.

The draft *Natural Heritage Act* was introduced to the Legislature on March 1, 1999.

This booklet is a revised version of the first proposed policy foundation document. It has been updated to reflect current direction on the draft *Natural Heritage Act*. Some major changes include the following:

- The names of the various classes have been changed to reduce confusion and improve public name recognition:
  - the "Provincial Nature Reserve" class was changed to "Ecological Reserve,"
  - "Natural Environment Provincial Park" was shortened to "Provincial Park," and
  - "Wildland Provincial Park" was shortened to "Wildland Park."
- The class definitions are updated to be consistent with the wording in the Act.
- A "Wilderness Reserve" class has been added to continue the Wilderness Areas as a separate class. The current level of protection for the Siffleur, White Goat and Ghost River Wilderness Areas will be carried over in the new legislation.
- New categories of the Recreation Area class now reflect the broad nature of the class and the variety of sites, recreation opportunities and facilities available.
- Some proposed management guidelines have been updated to reflect current direction contained in the draft Act.
- The table of "Permitted Activities by Class" was updated to reflect class name changes and the categories within the Recreation Area class.

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What is the *Natural Heritage Act*?

The *Natural Heritage Act* is proposed legislation that will consolidate the management of Alberta's parks and other protected areas under a single piece of legislation. Currently, these areas are managed under three separate pieces of legislation: the *Provincial Parks Act*; the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act*; and the *Willmore Wilderness Park Act*. Under these three Acts, there are seven different classes of areas that provide varying degrees of protection and opportunities for recreation (Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas, Provincial Parks, Wildland Parks, Willmore Wilderness Park and Recreation Areas). The *Natural Heritage Act* will establish a single, coherent system of six classes. It also will clarify the purpose for each class and specify the uses and activities allowed.

Once the new Act is approved, all existing parks and protected areas will be reviewed and assigned to one of the six proposed classes. Similarly, each new park or protected area will be designated according to one of the six classes.

What is the proposed policy foundation?

The original proposed policy foundation document introduced legislative concepts, the classification system, and general management guidelines that would be incorporated in the proposed Act. The document was based on the recommendations made by the Provincial Co-ordinating Committee for Special Places, an internal analysis of issues related to the parks and protected areas program, and preliminary feedback from other government departments and stakeholders.

Once the *Natural Heritage Act* is approved, a more detailed policy foundation document will be developed to guide the long-term management of the province's parks and protected areas. The final policy foundation will be publicly released when the *Natural Heritage Act* is proclaimed.

Why develop a new Act?

Stakeholders identified issues over the past few years that require the attention of Alberta Environment:

- Lack of clarity regarding the intent/purpose of the various classes of sites (e.g., some Natural Areas, Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas are indistinguishable in terms of use and management).

- Duplication and overlap of legislation.

- Lack of legislation for some existing protected areas (e.g., there are no regulations regarding permissible activities within Natural Areas).

- Lack of consistency regarding recreation and tourism opportunities and services that can be provided in the various classes of areas.

The Alberta Government identified four goals for the province's parks and protected areas program. The new Act will help achieve these goals:

1. ***Preservation*** - to preserve and protect into perpetuity a network of representative, special and outstanding natural landscapes and features as well as landscape-related prehistoric, historic and cultural resources in Alberta.

2. ***Heritage Appreciation*** - to provide opportunities to explore, understand and appreciate the natural and historical heritage of Alberta, and enhance public awareness of our natural environment and our relationship to and dependence on it.

3. ***Outdoor Recreation*** - to provide a variety of natural, landscape-dependent, outdoor recreation opportunities, and related facilities and services.

4. ***Heritage Tourism*** - to encourage residents and visitors to discover and enjoy the natural, historical and cultural heritage of the province through a variety of outdoor recreation and interpretive opportunities, facilities and services.

How does the *Natural Heritage Act* relate to the Special Places initiative?

In 1995, the Alberta government announced its commitment to Special Places. This initiative provides a strategic plan to complete a comprehensive system of protected areas representing the environmental diversity of Alberta's six natural regions and 20 subregions by the year 2000. Special Places are protected areas that are explicitly legislated and managed to preserve significant elements of Alberta's natural heritage. The Special Places program supports other provincial, national and international initiatives for conservation and the sustainable use of resources.

Special Places primarily will be implemented through existing legislation. When it is passed and proclaimed, the *Natural Heritage Act* will provide for the long-term management and protection of these areas.

When complete, the Special Places program will ensure a natural legacy for future generations of Albertans.

What guidelines are being used to develop the *Natural Heritage Act*?

The following guidelines will provide a framework for developing the *Natural Heritage Act*:

- The three existing Acts—the *Provincial Parks Act*; the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act*; and the *Willmore Wilderness Park Act*—should be consolidated into a single piece of legislation, the proposed *Natural Heritage Act*.

- The intent of the new Act and the rationale for Alberta's network of parks and protected areas should be clearly set out.

- The Act should establish a coherent classification system that provides a range of classes offering varying degrees of protection.

- The Act should explicitly define each class, stating its purpose and specific prohibitions. This definition should provide a framework for the management of each area in a class and provide all potential users with a high degree of certainty as to what uses and activities will be permitted and where.

- The new Act should provide the basis to develop management plans, which should be mandatory for each area. Review of management plans, with amendments as required, should be mandatory.

- The requirement for public participation should be clearly set out. Public notice and participation should be required for site designation and the development of management plans.

- Wilderness Areas, Willmore Wilderness Park, most Provincial Parks and all Ecological Reserves but one are free of any resource developments. The long-term objective is to have all Ecological Reserves, Wildland Parks, Provincial Parks and Heritage Rangelands free of any resource development activities.

  - ***Existing Protected Areas:*** a few existing areas have resource dispositions that were issued before designation. These dispositions will be honoured under the *Natural Heritage Act*. Over time, the resources will be depleted and the developments phased out. No new dispositions for mining will be issued. All new oil and gas development agreements will have a "no surface access" addendum. Consequently, the resource can be developed only from outside the protected area boundary.

  - ***New Protected Areas:*** it is not always possible to select new areas that are free of resource commitments. Existing dispositions in new areas will be honoured unless they are lawfully withdrawn, terminated or amended by mutual agreement, or voluntarily relinquished by the disposition holder. Timber dispositions and quotas will be withdrawn before designation, and no new timber dispositions or quotas will be issued in these areas.

Highlights and key improvements in the *Natural Heritage Act*

- The legislation has been streamlined and updated. The proposed *Natural Heritage Act* provides for six classes of parks and protected areas to cover a range of protection. The Act also ensures any land removed from a protected area is replaced with equivalent land of equal or higher quality and of the same class.

- The *Natural Heritage Act* explicitly defines each class, states its purpose and provides a framework for management of areas within each class. The Act includes specific prohibitions to achieve the purpose of each class.

- Mandatory provisions for management planning have been added. These provisions specify the purpose of plans and their use in the long-term management of each area. Plans will be reviewed and amended, if necessary, at intervals of no more than 10 years.

- Provisions for mandatory public notice and public involvement have been included. The Minister also may direct that public consultation or public hearings be held on any matters relating to the Act.

- The ability to use different combinations of classes and/or zoning to manage very large areas (e.g., Kananaskis Country) has been added.

- Offence and penalty provisions have been updated to be consistent with other departmental legislation. Maximum penalty provisions have increased to reflect the value society places on its parks and protected areas.

What is the proposed classification system?

Parks and protected areas across Alberta vary in size, in the capability of the landscape to sustain visitor use, and in the sensitivity and significance of the natural heritage they preserve. The *Natural Heritage Act* will introduce a new classification system consisting of six classes:

1. Ecological Reserve
2. Wilderness Reserve
3. Wildland Park
4. Provincial Park
5. Heritage Rangeland
6. Recreation Area

The six proposed classes range from the highly protected Ecological Reserve and Wilderness Reserve classes through to the Recreation Area class, which is devoted primarily to outdoor recreation. Collectively, the six classes constitute the parks and protected areas network. The network, rather than the individual areas, provides for the diversity of ecosystems, special features, outdoor recreation opportunities, heritage appreciation opportunities and heritage tourism experiences.

The classification system recognizes that the emphasis of each of the four program goals—preservation, heritage appreciation, outdoor recreation and heritage tourism—will be different in each class. In addition, site-specific factors may further refine the degree to which applicable goals can be met. For example, recreation opportunities may not be compatible with the preservation goals for a particular area. The classification system will describe the activities that are prohibited as well as the activities that may be appropriate in each class. However, not all activities that generally are permitted in a class necessarily will be permitted in each area within that class. The management planning process will be used to determine whether specific activities permitted within a given class will occur within a specific area.

Implementation of the *Natural Heritage Act* will require all existing areas to be reviewed and assessed to determine the most appropriate classification for them. This assessment will consider the significance of natural features, contribution to the four program goals, site condition, current management objectives, and existing uses and commitments. Each area will be placed in the class that will provide the highest level of protection based on this evaluation.

The following section describes the six proposed classes under the *Natural Heritage Act*. Examples illustrate where existing areas may fit into each proposed class.

1 Ecological Reserve

Ecological Reserves would preserve and protect natural heritage in an undisturbed state for scientific research and education.

The Ecological Reserve class will:

- be given the highest level of protection;
- contain some of Alberta's rarest and most fragile landscapes, geological features, plants and animals; and
- focus on the preservation goal and understanding of natural heritage values.

The primary intent of this class is strict preservation of natural ecosystems, habitats and features, and associated biodiversity. Ecological Reserves make significant contributions to heritage appreciation by providing educational opportunities related to scientific research on the site.

Existing Ecological Reserves with long-term grazing commitments provide the model for the new Heritage Rangeland class and would be placed in that class. Once the existing oil and gas wells in Plateau Mountain Ecological Reserve are abandoned, there will be no dispositions in the Ecological Reserve class. This absence of dispositions will strengthen the Ecological Reserve class considerably.

Examples: A number of existing Natural Areas with significant ecological values could be placed in the Ecological Reserve class, thus affording them a higher level of protection. The Genesee Natural Area is a good example.

2 Wilderness Reserve

Wilderness Reserves would preserve and protect natural heritage, while providing opportunities for experiencing nature in an undisturbed state.

The Wilderness Reserve class will ensure lasting preservation of the ecological integrity of natural landscapes and ecological processes, along with associated biological diversity.

Alberta's three existing Wilderness Areas (White Goat, Siffleur and Ghost River) are among the most protected areas in Canada. Bordering Banff and Jasper National Parks, these three areas encompass over 1000 km^2 of rugged terrain and fragile environments. The Wilderness Area class currently exists under the *Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas Act*.

Under the new *Natural Heritage Act*, Wilderness Areas will become Wilderness Reserves. Existing protection will stay the same and current prohibitions would continue. No developments of any kind will be permitted in Wilderness Reserves. Travel in these areas will be by foot. Fishing, hunting and trapping will not be allowed. Collection, destruction and removal of plant or animal material, fossils or other objects of geological, ethnological, historical or scientific interest will be prohibited.

Examples: The three existing Wilderness Areas provide the model for the Wilderness Reserve class. The existing level of protection for these areas, as well as the current range of activities, has been retained in the proposed management guidelines.

3 Wildland Park

Wildland Parks would preserve and protect natural heritage, while providing opportunities for backcountry recreation and experiencing nature in an undisturbed state.

The Wildland Park class will:

- ensure lasting preservation of the ecological integrity of natural landscapes and ecological processes, along with associated biological diversity;
- provide opportunities for backcountry recreation; and
- include Wildland Parks that are free of any resource commitments, but also will include Wildland Parks that contain some existing resource commitments.

Wildland Parks are generally large, undeveloped, natural landscapes that retain their primeval character without human habitation. This class currently exists under the *Provincial Parks Act* and would continue under the *Natural Heritage Act*. Willmore Wilderness Park, which currently is under its own legislation, will move into this class.

Existing levels of protection will stay the same under the new Act. Activities that are not permitted under the existing legislation would be excluded under the *Natural Heritage Act*. The existing range of recreation activities in each of these areas would be maintained as well.

Examples:

Willmore Wilderness Park has been used as the model for this class. The existing level of protection for Willmore, as well as the current range of activities, has been retained in the proposed management guidelines.

The proposed Wildland Park class would include the existing Elbow Sheep, Kakwa and Fort Assiniboine Wildland Parks, but would provide a higher level of protection than these areas have currently. There will be no change to the management of these three areas under the proposed Wildland Park class.

Recently, Wind Valley Natural Area was incorporated into the new Bow Valley Wildland Park. Similarly, Cardinal Divide Natural Area became part of the Whitehorse Wildland Park. The Wildland Park class affords a significantly higher level of protection for these areas than the former Natural Area class.

4 Provincial Park

Provincial Parks would preserve and protect natural heritage. These parks also provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, heritage tourism and appreciation of natural heritage, which are dependent on and compatible with the protection of the environment.

The Provincial Park class will:

- have preservation as the primary goal;
- provide significant opportunities for heritage appreciation;
- include "flagship" Provincial Parks that are significant provincial destinations for heritage tourism; and
- be the class where the public can expect nature-oriented recreation opportunities supported by facilities and heritage appreciation programs.

This class currently exists under the *Provincial Parks Act* and would continue under the *Natural Heritage Act*. Provincial Parks are distinguished from Wildland Parks by the greater range of outdoor recreation facilities available, the extent of road access provided, and the interpretive and educational programs. The level of protection would be slightly higher than that of current Provincial Parks. Unlike the current situation, however, this protection would be backed by legislation rather than policy or practice.

Examples: Approximately half of Alberta's existing Provincial Parks would be placed in this class. Typical examples include Bow Valley, Lesser Slave Lake, Carson-Pegasus, Dinosaur, Cypress Hills and Writing-On-Stone Provincial Parks. Some existing Recreation Areas that have significant ecological value in addition to outdoor recreational value also could be placed in this class. Recreation Areas such as Pierre Greys Lakes and Rock Lake are good examples. The other Provincial Parks would be assessed and moved to the appropriate category of Recreation Area.

5 Heritage Rangeland

Heritage Rangelands would preserve and protect natural heritage representative of Alberta's prairies, using grazing to maintain the grassland ecology.

The Heritage Rangeland class will:

- provide a new class of protected area that does not exist in current legislation;
- have preservation as its primary goal; and
- ensure lasting preservation of the ecological integrity and biological diversity associated with Alberta's native grasslands, while sustaining the traditional grazing approach to the management of Heritage Rangelands.

Herds of bison played a major role in shaping the characteristic biodiversity of the grasslands. Cattle have replaced bison as primary grazers. For many years, carefully managed cattle grazing has contributed to the ecological integrity of some very large tracts of the continent's finest remaining prairies. Ongoing protection of these rangelands will require the continuation of the traditional grazing approach that has preserved these grasslands for so many years.

Heritage Rangelands will be designated under the *Natural Heritage Act*; however, grazing dispositions in Heritage Rangelands will continue to be managed under the *Public Lands Act*. Management plans will be developed for all Heritage Rangelands, and management practices will continue much the same as at present. A committee consisting of the lessees or allotment holders, representatives of other stakeholder groups and the appropriate government agencies will prepare management plans.

Subject to the provisions of the management plan and to rights of the lessee, the day-to-day management of grazing operations will be the responsibility of the lessee in conjunction with the appropriate land management agency (Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Municipal Affairs-Special Areas Board; and Environment).

Outdoor recreation is not a priority for Heritage Rangelands. However, limited opportunities may be provided for non-facility-based outdoor recreation to the extent that it is compatible with the preservation of natural values and grazing management.

Examples: Rumsey and Ross Lake Natural Areas, as well as Rumsey, Hand Hills and Wainwright Dunes Ecological Reserves, are good examples of existing areas that may fit this class. Most of the new, larger Special Places in the White Area (settled part of Alberta) likely will fit into this class.

6 Recreation Area

Recreation Areas would:

- ensure the preservation and protection of sites of local interest;
- provide access to lakes, rivers, reservoirs and adjacent land belonging to the Crown for outdoor recreation; and
- provide facilities to support outdoor recreation and tourism.

Although some Recreation Areas make minor contributions to the preservation goal, this class is essential for the delivery of outdoor recreation opportunities at the regional and local level. The Recreation Area class will be relatively broad, including both natural and modified landscapes. Recreation Areas will be managed with outdoor recreation and heritage tourism as the priority objectives, and will include accommodation and outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities not typically associated with the other classes. Some areas will be intensively developed, while others would remain largely undeveloped to provide a place for bird watching or cross-country skiing. Many Recreation Areas play a significant role in the management of adjacent Crown lands and waters by localizing impacts of development and serving as staging areas.

Heritage appreciation opportunities generally will be limited. Some Recreation Areas will be developed and managed for intensive recreation, and may include both camping and day-use facilities. Facilities and opportunities in this class typically will be developed and managed by the private sector or "not for profit" groups. Other land uses may be accommodated, but these uses must be compatible with outdoor recreation. Maintenance of aesthetics and quality recreation experiences will be the determining factors.

Some new parks and protected areas have existing uses or resource commitments that prevent them from being established in the intended class immediately. The Recreation Area class is being reviewed as a possible holding class for such areas. These areas would be held in the Natural Recreation Area category (see page 15 and 16) until conflicting resource commitments are phased out. In the interim, the area would be managed to meet the intended class requirements.

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Examples: All existing highway waysides, most existing Recreation Areas and fishery access sites on lakes and reservoirs fit into the Recreation Area class, as does the Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area. Existing Provincial Parks that do not contain provincially significant ecological values, and where the majority of the land base is dedicated to recreation facility development, will be placed in the Recreation Area class.

Most existing recreation-oriented Natural Areas will become Natural Recreation Areas. This category reflects their local significance or existing commitments that preclude their designation as Ecological Reserves.

Categories of Recreation Area

The variety of areas and recreation opportunities available in the Recreation Area class necessitates development of a number of categories. The categories will clarify the types and levels of facilities and services that may be developed to support various outdoor recreation activities. The categories of Recreation Area will be defined in the regulations under the *Natural Heritage Act*. Each category focuses on a different type of outdoor experience.

Natural Recreation Area - includes natural or near-natural landscapes of local and regional significance for nature-oriented recreation and heritage appreciation. The size of areas in this category varies considerably. Areas of provincial or greater significance may be placed in this category on an interim basis, as a result of existing resource commitments that preclude their designation as Ecological Reserves. Areas of provincial or greater significance may be considered for redesignation in more highly protected classes once conflicting uses are removed. Development in Natural Recreation Areas is limited to parking areas and trails. Some of the larger areas may accommodate backcountry camping.

Special Recreation Area - generally these areas are relatively large and provide opportunities for backcountry recreation and enjoyment of nature in natural or near-natural settings while permitting other compatible land uses. Portions of some areas may be ecologically significant and contribute to the preservation goal, if surface disturbance and industrial activities are excluded. Some areas may support a full range of recreation facilities.

Regional Recreation Area - these areas generally are small, offer local or regional recreation destinations and support the local tourism industry. Recreation Areas in this category include both natural and modified landscapes. Facilities vary from rustic campgrounds and picnic sites to fully serviced campgrounds. A wide range of amenities such as golf courses, fast food outlets, motels and gas stations may be considered in these sites, subject to approval in the management plan.

Wayside Recreation Area - these small areas are located along primary highways and secondary roads and support tourism by providing convenient rest areas and picnic stops for the travelling public. Facilities in these areas are minimal.

Access Sites - generally small, these sites provide staging areas for general Crown land recreation or access to fisheries on lakes, streams or reservoirs. Facilities in these sites are minimal.

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A comparison of management guidelines under current legislation and proposed under the *Natural Heritage Act*

The following table compares current management guidelines for parks and protected areas with guidelines proposed for the new *Natural Heritage Act*.

Exact comparisons between the existing and proposed classes are impossible. Many parks and protected areas in existing classes would be moved to different, more appropriate classes under the new *Natural Heritage Act*. In general, however, areas would be redesignated as follows:

- ***Ecological Reserves*** will include existing Ecological Reserves except those in which livestock grazing is used to maintain the grassland ecology. Also included in this class will be existing Natural Areas that have provincially significant ecological values and are not encumbered with existing resource commitments.
- ***Wilderness Reserves*** will include the existing Wilderness Areas (White Goat, Siffleur and Ghost River). Existing prohibitions will be carried over.
- ***Wildland Parks*** will include the existing Wildland Parks under the *Provincial Parks Act*, and Willmore Wilderness Park. Several larger Natural Areas will be absorbed by new Wildland Parks and will be included in this class.
- ***Provincial Parks*** will include existing Provincial Parks with provincially significant ecological values, along with a few similar Natural Areas. Some existing Recreation Areas that include significant ecological values could be included in this class.
- ***Heritage Rangelands*** will include existing Ecological Reserves and Natural Areas, primarily in the Grasslands Natural Region, where it is desirable to continue to use livestock grazing to sustain the grassland ecology.
- ***Recreation Areas*** will include most existing Recreation Areas, Provincial Parks that do not have provincially significant ecological values and are dedicated to recreation facility development, and Natural Areas that do not contain provincially significant ecological values, but remain locally important for various types of outdoor recreation.

Recreational Uses & Facilities	Current Management Guidelines
1.	
Foot Access	Foot access generally is permitted in all classes. Under the *Provincial Parks Act*, the Minister has authority to close or restrict access to protect ecological values, public safety or for management purposes.
2.	
Recreational Hunting	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas. Permitted in Ecological Reserves and Provincial Parks only where required to control problem wildlife populations. Permitted in Natural Areas, Wildland Parks, Willmore Wilderness Park and larger Recreation Areas.
3.	
Fishing	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves. Permitted in the other classes.

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Foot access generally is permitted in all classes. The Minister may close or restrict access to protect ecological values, public safety or for management purposes. In Heritage Rangelands, foot access to leased land will be permitted with the permission of the lessee and subject to the terms and conditions in the area's management plan.	No change from existing policy. Heritage Rangeland is a new class of protected area. Foot access to leased land will respect the management of the grazing operations.
Prohibited in Wilderness Reserves. Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Provincial Parks, except as required for management purposes to control wildlife populations and restore ecological balance. Permitted in Wildland Parks where hunting occured at the time of designation. May be permitted in Heritage Rangelands and Recreation Areas subject to guidelines in the management plan.	No change from current policy.
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Reserves. Permitted in Wildland Parks that were open to fishing at the time of establishment. Permitted in the other classes.	No change.

Recreational Uses & Facilities	Current Management Guidelines
4.	
Horse Use	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas. Recreational use is discouraged in Ecological Reserves. Permitted in Willmore Wilderness Park, Wildland Parks and Natural Areas. Permitted in designated areas or on designated trails in Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas.
5.	
Cycling, Mountain Biking	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas and Willmore Wilderness Park. Generally restricted to roads and designated trails in Provincial Parks. Cycling may be permitted on routes as specified in the management plan in Ecological Reserves, Wildland Parks and Provincial Parks. Permitted in Natural Areas and Recreation Areas.
6.	
Backcountry Camping	Prohibited in Ecological Reserves. Permitted in all other classes where land base is large enough. Restricted to designated areas in some classes. No facilities may be constructed in Wilderness Areas.

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Reserves. Permitted in Wildland Parks where it was permitted at the time of designation. Permitted in the other classes subject to terms and conditions as set out in management plans. Encouraged for the management of cattle in Heritage Rangelands.	Prohibition in Ecological Reserves will be accommodated by moving existing Ecological Reserves with grazing to the Heritage Rangeland class.
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Reserves. May be permitted on specific routes in Wildland Parks where use already was well established at the time of designation. May be permitted in Heritage Rangelands subject to approval in the management plan. Restricted to roads and designated trails in Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas.	Prohibited in Ecological Reserves.
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves. No facilities may be constructed in Wilderness Reserves. May be permitted in all other classes subject to regulations and the terms and conditions of the management plan.	No change from current policy.

Recreational Uses & Facilities	Current Management Guidelines
7.	
Auto Access Campgrounds	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Wildland Parks, Natural Areas and Willmore Wilderness Park. Permitted in Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas.
8.	
Commercial Tourism Facilities[1]	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas, Willmore Wilderness Park and Wildland Parks. May be permitted in Provincial Parks providing it is consistent with the primary intent of preserving the natural landscape. Permitted in Recreation Areas.
9.	
Power Boating	Prohibited in Ecological Reserves, Wilderness Areas and Willmore Wilderness Park. Permitted in the other classes subject to boating restrictions under the *Canada Shipping Act*.

[1] ***Commercial Tourism Facilities*** include hotels or motels, RV parks, golf courses, downhill ski areas, heli-skiing operations, or similar types of development. It does not include rustic fixed-roof accommodation such as a rustic hostel, backcountry hut, or similar facilities.

Activity *Current*

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves, Wilderness Reserves and Heritage Rangelands. Prohibited in Wildland Parks except for staging areas, which must be on the perimeter. Permitted in Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas.	Provision for staging areas on the perimeter of Wildland Parks. Auto access camping will be prohibited in Heritage Rangelands.
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves, Wilderness Reserves, Wildland Parks and Heritage Rangelands. Restricted to existing developments and commitments within Provincial Parks. Prohibited in Natural Recreation Areas. May be permitted in other categories of Recreation Area subject to approval and conditions in the area's management plan.	Restricted to existing commitments and developments in Provincial Parks.
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Reserves. Normally permitted on rivers and lakes in Wildland Parks and Provincial Parks where the activity already occurs and access is available. Prohibited in Heritage Rangelands except as required for management or in emergencies. Permitted in Recreation Areas.	No policy change other than the addition of the Heritage Rangeland class.

Recreational Uses & Facilities	Current Management Guidelines
10.	
Outdoor Recreation Facilities[2]	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas and Ecological Reserves. Restricted to trails and primitive facilities in Wildland Parks, Willmore Wilderness Park and Natural Areas. A wide range of facilities are permitted in Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas.
11.	
Off-Highway Vehicles and Snowmobiles	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas, Willmore Wilderness Park and Ecological Reserves. In Wildland Parks, designated routes that existed at the time of establishment may be considered to ensure continuity of regional trail systems. In Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas, facilities may serve as staging areas for adjacent land provided there are no conflicts with other users and natural values are not compromised. Permitted in Natural Areas and in some Recreation Areas that have an off-highway vehicle zone or designated trails.

[2] ***Outdoor Recreation Facilities*** include facilities such as campgrounds, picnic areas, hiking and interpretive trails, view points, boat launches and beach areas, etc.

Activity *Current*

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Reserves. Limited to trails, trail bridges and backcountry campsites in Wildland Parks and Recreation Areas in the 'natural' category. Limited in Provincial Parks to those facilities that enhance heritage appreciation, recreation and tourism use associated with protection of the natural environment. A wide range of facilities will be permitted in the Recreation Area class.	Clear separation of Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas will clarify the intent of these sites. The range of recreation facilities available in Provincial Parks will be narrower than currently permitted in Provincial Parks, while the range of facilities for some categories of Recreation Area will be broadened. No change for Wilderness Reserves, Wildland Parks or Ecological Reserves.
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves, Wilderness Reserves and Provincial Parks. Permitted in Heritage Rangelands for management activities associated with a valid disposition. In some Provincial Parks, staging areas may be used to provide snowmobile access to lakes or Crown land outside the park. Prohibited in Wildland Parks, Heritage Rangelands and Recreation Areas except on trails that existed at the time of establishment and were approved for continuation in the management plan.	No significant change from the current policy except for the possible designation of routes in Wildland Parks where use patterns already are well established.

12.

Motor Vehicle Access

Prohibited in Wilderness Areas. Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Willmore Wilderness Park except for management activities or activities associated with a valid disposition. Restricted to designated roads in Provincial Parks, Recreation Areas and Natural Areas.

13.

Aircraft Landing

Prohibited in all classes except with written authorization for research or management purposes, or in the case of emergencies.

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Prohibited in Wilderness Reserves. Prohibited in Ecological Reserves, Wildland Parks and Heritage Rangelands except for management activities, or carrying out approved operations associated with a disposition or research permit. Restricted to designated roads in Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas.	No change from current policy.
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves, Wilderness Reserves and Heritage Rangelands except for emergencies, approved research and management, or operations associated with an existing disposition. Float plane access to designated lakes in some Wildland Parks and Provincial Parks may be permitted subject to the management plan where use existed prior to establishment of the area. Helicopters and float planes may be permitted in Recreation Areas subject to the management plan. Airstrips are prohibited in all classes.	Permitted in Recreation Areas for recreation purposes subject to the management plan. Float plane access may be permitted to designated lakes in some Provincial Parks and Wildland Parks subject to the management plan.

Non-Recreational Uses & Facilities	Current Management Guidelines
14. Trapping	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas. Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Provincial Parks except as required for management purposes. Existing traplines are phased out in these areas. Permitted in Wildland Parks, Willmore Wilderness Park, Natural Areas and large Recreation Areas.
15. Domestic Livestock Grazing	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas and Wildland Parks. Permitted as part of the ongoing management of Provincial Parks and Ecological Reserves in the Grassland, Parkland and Montane. Prohibited in Natural Areas with the exception of new Special Places in the Grassland Region where Natural Areas are being used as an interim designation pending the creation of the Heritage Rangeland class. Permitted in Recreation Areas, but usually precluded by the small size of these areas.
16. Commercial Logging	Currently prohibited in all classes except some Recreation Areas where small-scale logging may be considered where it is compatible with recreation objectives.

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Reserves. Prohibited in Provincial Parks except as required for management purposes. Permitted to continue in Wildland Parks, Heritage Rangelands and Recreation Areas where it occurred before establishment of the area, subject to approval and any conditions set out in the management plan.	No change from current policy.
Prohibited in Wilderness Reserves and Ecological Reserves. Will continue as the primary management tool in Heritage Rangelands and will be permitted in some Recreation Areas. Will continue in those Provincial Parks where it has been used as a management tool. Restricted to existing allotments under the *Forest Reserves Act* in cases where new Wildland Parks are established.	No change in policy for existing areas. The Heritage Rangeland class is created to accommodate protected areas where grazing is the primary management tool for sustaining the grassland ecology. Natural Areas and Ecological Reserves with ongoing grazing will be moved to this class. Only those Natural Areas that are free from long-term grazing dispositions will be considered for the Ecological Reserve class.
Prohibited in all classes. In new areas, timber dispositions and quotas must be withdrawn prior to establishment of the area. Any existing commitments in Recreation Areas will continue until expiry.	Current prohibitions continue in all protected areas. No change in policy other than in Recreation Areas. Areas committed to commercial logging no longer will be established as Recreation Areas.

Non-Recreational Uses & Facilities	Current Management Guidelines
17. Commercial Telecommunications Towers	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas. New towers prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Provincial Parks.
18. Oil and Gas Development	Sub-surface mineral sales and activities related to oil and gas are prohibited in Wilderness Areas. New developments are prohibited in Ecological Reserves. Developments that existed at the time of Ecological Reserve establishment continue until the resource is depleted. New sub-surface rights that may be sold are subject to a 'no surface access' addendum. In Wildland Parks and Provincial Parks, existing commitments are honoured. New mineral sales are subject to a 'no surface access' addendum. Conditions are applied to minimize impacts. In Natural Areas, activities are determined on a case-by-case basis. Conditions are applied to protect sensitive and scenic land. In Recreation Areas, ongoing oil and gas development is permitted subject to specific terms and conditions intended to minimize conflict with recreational use.

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Prohibited in Wilderness Reserves and Ecological Reserves. Existing towers may remain in other classes. New towers prohibited in all classes except the Recreation Area class.	No change from current practice.
Prohibited in Wilderness Reserves. In Ecological Reserves, developments will be restricted to those that existed at the time of establishment. In Wildland Parks, Provincial Parks and Heritage Rangelands, developments will be restricted to existing sub-surface dispositions. All new sales will have a 'no surface access' addendum. Infrastructure associated with existing commitments would be phased out over time in a planned manner. In Recreation Areas, ongoing sales and development will be permitted subject to conditions. Existing 'no surface access' restrictions will continue in all areas.	The Heritage Rangeland class has been added. Natural Areas where ongoing development is permitted are moved to the Recreation Area class. Natural Areas that have provincially significant features and which currently preclude development are moved to the Ecological Reserve class. No significant changes in the rest of the classes other than reference to phase out in a planned manner.

Non-Recreational Uses & Facilities	Current Management Guidelines
19. Surface Minerals	There currently are no dispositions for development of sand, gravel, clay, peat, marl or other surface minerals in any class of area.
20. Mining	Currently prohibited in all classes with the exception of new Special Places sites where existing commitments will be honoured.
21. Mainline Pipelines	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Willmore Wilderness Park. Permitted in Provincial Parks and Natural Areas under strict conditions if no alternatives exist. Permitted in Recreation Areas.

Activity *Current*

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Exploration and development of all surface minerals will continue to be prohibited.	No change from current policy.
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Reserves. Prohibited in all other classes with the exception of honouring existing commitments. No new sub-surface dispositions will be issued after designation. If a company holding the rights wishes to develop an existing commitment, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board will review the proposal through the existing regulatory process. Should a mine be approved, the area will be deleted from the protected area network and equivalent lands added to replace the withdrawal.	Existing parks and protected areas have very few existing sub-surface commitments for mining. Mining will continue to be prohibited in all classes with the exception of honouring existing commitments. The requirement to replace land in the event of withdrawal is a new provision.
Prohibited in Wilderness Reserves. Reclassification may create Wildland Parks, Provincial Parks and Heritage Rangelands with existing mainline pipeline commitments. These existing commitments will be honoured. Access will continue for ongoing operations, maintenance of facilities, and emergencies. Expansion of the pipeline corridor may be allowed where there are no feasible alternatives for re-routing the pipeline. May be permitted in Recreation Areas when the recreation value of the area is not compromised.	No change from current policy.

Non-Recreational Uses & Facilities	Current Management Guidelines
22. **Resource Roads**[3]	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves and Willmore Wilderness Park. Permitted with conditions in Wildland Parks and Provincial Parks to access existing commitments. Permitted in Natural Areas and Recreation Areas on a case-by-case basis.
23. **Cultivation**	Precluded in all classes except in Recreation Areas such as Blackfoot where it is a component of multiple use management.

[3] ***Resource Roads*** are roads that provide access to resources either within or outside a park or protected area. Roads usually are closed and reclaimed once the resource activity ends, unless the roads also provide access to outdoor recreation facilities.

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Reserves. Permitted in Wildland Parks, Provincial Parks and Heritage Rangelands to access existing resource commitments using existing rights-of-way where possible. May be permitted in Recreation Areas where there are no serious conflicts with recreational use.	No change from existing policy.
Prohibited in all classes except the Recreation Area class where it may be a component of multiple use management in areas such as Blackfoot.	No change from current policy.

Management Activities	Current Management Guidelines
24.	
Water Management	Water management structures prohibited in Ecological Reserves and Wilderness Areas. No specific prohibition in Provincial Parks, Wildland Provincial Parks or Recreation Areas. Small dams or weirs are located in some parks and Recreation Areas. Many Recreation Areas are adjacent to reservoirs and provide recreational access.
25.	
Forest and Range Protection	Wildfires are suppressed in all classes on a priority basis. Most insect infestations and diseases are monitored and eradication/control programs are implemented as required to prevent spread to commercial forests on adjacent Crown land and/or to prevent significant ecological change within the area.

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Diversion of water or other water management activities would be prohibited in Ecological Reserves, Wilderness Reserves and Wildland Parks. Subject to the *Water Act*, the department may carry out activities to achieve specific management objectives, or protect outdoor recreation facilities in Provincial Parks and Heritage Rangelands. Water management to enhance outdoor recreation may be considered in Recreation Areas.	Some formalization of existing practice. No significant policy change.
Wildfires will continue to be suppressed in all classes. Smaller fires that may be beneficial to the maintenance or renewal of the ecological values of the areas may be allowed to burn in all protected areas, provided the risk of progressing to unmanageable size and intensity is minimal, and no immediate control action is required to protect facilities within the area or other resources on adjacent lands. Such fires will be closely monitored. Insect infestations and tree diseases within protected areas will continue to be monitored and eradication/control programs will be implemented when required to maintain the ecological values of the areas and to protect forest values and adjacent land. Sanitation cutting and controlled burning are the preferred control methods, but other methods may be considered when necessary. Forest and range protection activities in all classes will be carried out in accordance with the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act* and its regulations, and with approved management plans.	Some clarification of approach. No major change in policy.
Proposed	*Change*

Management Activities	Current Management Guidelines
26.	
Vegetation Management[4]	Prohibited in Wilderness Areas. Permitted in Ecological Reserves and to achieve specific ecological objectives. Permitted in facility areas of Provincial Parks and in Recreation Areas for visitor safety and to enhance recreation opportunities. Permitted in all classes as required to comply with the *Weed Control Act*.
27.	
Management Activities	The use of motor vehicles, horses, off-highway vehicles, snowmobiles, aircraft, etc., is permitted in all classes for work that is related to resource protection and monitoring, environmental research, visitor management, public safety and search and rescue or other emergencies, forest and range protection, vegetation management, general management, and enforcement activities carried out by or on behalf of the province.

[4] ***Vegetation Management*** means active intervention to control or eradicate noxious weeds, control or remove non-native species to restore ecosystems, remove hazardous trees in campgrounds or around facilities for visitor safety, and to protect infrastructure from damage.

Proposed Management Guidelines	Change
Prohibited in Wilderness Reserves. Permitted in all classes to comply with the *Weed Control Act* using methods that are effective and least detrimental to non-target organisms. May be permitted in Ecological Reserves, Wildland Parks, Heritage Rangelands and Provincial Parks to achieve specific ecological objectives. May be permitted in Recreation Areas where it does not conflict with recreational use. Although the use of prescribed burning and prescribed tree and stand removal by cutting will be the preferred tools in vegetation management, other alternative protocols also may be considered provided ecological objectives are not compromised.	No significant change to current policy.
Use of motorized vehicles and other conveyances by department staff or others completing work on behalf of the province would continue in all classes.	No change from current policy.

Table of Permitted Activities by Class

The table on the following page outlines activities that will be permitted in the various classes of parks and protected areas. ***Please note that the table provides general direction only and must be read in conjunction with detailed management guidelines described on pages 18-39.***

Permitted Use — Uses that are considered to be compatible with the intent of the protected area designation.

Conditional Use — Uses that may be compatible with the intent of the protected area designation. Special conditions and controls will be applied where necessary. The management plan will determine if an activity occurs within a given area. If an activity is permitted in a certain class, but was prohibited in a specific site, that prohibition will continue.

Not Permitted Use — Uses that are not compatible with the intent of the protected area designation.

Qualifiers:

M Uses permitted for management purposes only.

E Existing despositions (i.e., issued before designation) will be honoured.

NA Opportunity generally is not available because of site limitations (e.g., size of the site).

D Through the management plan, use restricted to designated lakes/rivers, trails or areas identified at time of establishment.

NATURAL HERITAGE ACT

Natural Heritage Act - Activities by Class

Activity	Parks and Protected Areas: Ecological Reserve	Wilderness Reserve	Wildland Park	Provincial Park	Heritage Rangeland	Recreation Area Categories: Natural Recreation	Access Sites	Regional Recreation	Wayside Recreation	Special Recreation
Recreational Uses & Facilities										
Foot Access										
Recreational Hunting	M			M			NA		NA	
Fishing										
Horse Use										
Cycling, Mountain Biking					D					
Backcountry Camping					D		NA	NA	NA	
Auto Access Campgrounds										
Golf Courses				E			NA		NA	
Downhill Ski Areas				E			NA		NA	
Power Boating									NA	
Outdoor Recreation Facilities										
Off-Highway Vehicles			D						NA	
Snowmobiles			D						NA	
Motor Vehicle Access			M		M					
Helicopter Landing (for skiing or hiking)							NA		NA	
Float Plane Landing			D	D			NA		NA	
Non-Recreational Uses & Facilities										
Trapping			E				NA		NA	
Domestic Livestock Grazing				M			NA		NA	
Commercial Logging										
Commercial Telecommunications Towers			E	E	E		NA		NA	
Oil & Gas Development			E	E	E		NA		NA	
Surface Minerals							NA		NA	
Mining							NA	NA	NA	
Mainline Pipelines			E	E	E		NA		NA	
Resource Roads			E		E					
Cultivation										E

ERRATA:
- Off-highway vehicles and snowmobiles in Heritage Rangelands will be restricted to existing trails if use is approved in the management plan.
- Resource roads will not be permitted in Provincial Parks except to access existing resource commitments.

Summary

Overall, the policy foundation outlined here for the proposed *Natural Heritage Act* does not represent a significant shift in policy. It is an effort to document, formalize and clarify existing policy and practice, and to ensure more appropriate and fair application of policy to the province's parks and protected areas. Together, the proposed policy and *Natural Heritage Act* will streamline Alberta's parks and protected areas program and provide a basis for allocating both existing and new sites to the most appropriate class. Reducing the number of classes and clearly defining the purpose, objectives and management guidelines for each class will ensure greater clarity and public confidence in the management of Alberta's parks and protected areas.

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